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TRACTS BY CANADIAN LAYMEN.

No. 1.

THE DARK AGES.

A great deal has been said by Protestant preachers and writers about what are called the Dark Ages. These words are generally applied in a vague manner to a period of a few hundred years previous to the sixteenth century. If a consistent Protestant is pressed for his opinion as to the real duration of this period, he will probably reply that the leaven of error began to work soon after the Apostolic era, and that the Church remained corrupt until Martin Luther, a man chosen by God, effected its purification. Let us examine the matter, and try to find out whether those were truly the Dark Ages of the Church, and, if they were not, what other period more justly deserves that name.

It would certainly seem improbable that God, who has constituted His Church the Pillar and Ground of the Truth, as St. Paul says to St. Timothy, should allow that Church to lapse for long centuries into deadly error, and should then choose for His messengers men who were given up to uncleanness, and in whose hearts charity had no place; for not even to each other did they exercise brotherly love. Luther, in his book against the Sacramentarians, says that Zuingle is possessed, not by one demon, but by a whole crowd of them; Zuingle asserts that the devil is master of Luther. The Calvinists appeal to Prince Casimir in a Latin elegiac couplet, of which this is the sense:—
“O powerful Casimir, drive out the servants of Luther; kill them by the sword, by the wheel, by drowning, by hanging and by fire!” Besides this, it is well known that several of the German Reformers were adulterers and drunkards, and that when Landgrave Philip in the year 1540, his first wife being still alive, desired to marry another woman, Luther and Melancthon and Bucer were parties to this bigamy. Similarly the notorious Cranmer sanctioned the conduct of Henry VIII, who put away his first wife and murdered his second. Very different from such reformers were those holy men, Ezra, Nehemiah, and their fellow-workers, whom on a former occasion

God had selected to repair His Temple; and a far more seemly nursing-father of the Church was the great King Artaxerxes, than Henry VIII; such indeed is the ill fame of the latter monarch that Mr. Collier, a very Protestant historian, whose books are largely used in our Canadian schools, is obliged to describe him as "an unwieldy mass of corrupted flesh and evil passions."

Many people consider the Reformation to have been a great blessing, because it is said to have given us "an open Bible." Now, it may well be questioned how far an open Bible is a benefit to those who read it without the guidance of the Church. The Mormons have an open Bible, and argue from it the Divine allowance of polygamy; Abraham, say they, was the Friend of God, and he had more wives than one, and so may we; neither is it possible, without an appeal to the HOLY GHOST as speaking in His Church, to disprove this inference. It may be asked, too, how an open Bible was possible when printing was not invented, and when the accomplishment of reading belonged in consequence only to a few; but the Protestant disputant is always a little unreasonable, and not unfrequently expects bricks without providing straw. It may safely be affirmed that, in the so-called Dark Ages, the people were taught all things necessary to salvation. In the Vision concerning Piers Plowman, written about 1362 by an author who was a resolute opponent of Papal claims, one of the characters acknowledges that when he goes to church, and kneels before the cross, and should pray for the people, *as the priest teacheth*, his thoughts are otherwise occupied; so that if people did wrong in the "Dark Ages," they did not do wrong for want of knowing how to do right. Chaucer, who is contemporary with this writer, shows a remarkable knowledge of the Bible; as an instance of this, in one place he alludes (Prologue to *Melibeus*) to the differences between the narratives of the Four Evangelists, which, says he, are apparent and not real;

"For some of them say more, and some say less,
When they his piteous passion express,
I mean of Mark and Matthew, Luke and John;
But doubt(e)less their sentence is all one.

Thus a layman in the fourteenth century, when only manuscripts were to be had, could venture on a comparatively minute criticism of the Holy Scripture; and both he and the author of *Piers Plowman* frequently quote from its pages; yet we are asked to believe that the Book was completely sealed up

till Luther, who appeared a century and a half later, came to unlock it! On a par with this mischievous fiction is that other tale, that Luther one day accidentally discovered a Bible on the Convent shelf, and found its contents new to him; though, if he had said his daily office with any devotion, or even with any intelligence, he would have recognized its substantial identity with the discovered volume. This precious lie has been relegated to the dust-heap for some time by well-informed people; but it is still doing duty in the mouths of a few blatant and ignorant lecturers and pamphleteers, who infest this Dominion.

Those were not the Dark Ages, in which the fair Cathedrals and Abbeys of Europe rose: works that modern centuries have in vain striven to rival, whether in respect of pious liberality or of artistic skill; and in which the arms of a united Christendom endeavoured, with noble though futile effort, to save the Holy Places from being trodden down by the Moslem tyranny.

If those then were not the Dark Ages, does any other period deserve the name?

Yes; the period which followed the "Blessed Reformation" was one in which men sat in the shadow of death, an age whose very light was as the blackness of darkness.

We saw, before the sixteenth century, the growth of those flowers of art and devotion which still excite our wonder. Now, the traveller in England sees ruined shrines and broken altars in many places, the marks of Protestant fanaticism, traces of the vile rapacity of Henry VIII and the ugly brutality of Cromwell; and on enquiry he is told that those who wrought all this mischief believed they were doing God service. Let Fountains and Tintern, Newstead and Netley, tell the tale!

"Who sees these dismal heaps, but would demand
What barbarous invader sacked the land?
But when he hears no Goth, no Turk did bring
This desolation, but a Christian King,—
When nothing, but the name of zeal, appears
'Twixt our best actions and the worst of theirs,—
What does he think our sacrilege would spare,
If such the effects of our devotion are?"

—*Sir John Denham.*

Those were the Dark Ages, in which this repeated profanation occurred; when the people imagined a vain thing, and the rulers took counsel together, against the LORD, and against His CHRIST.

We find from the "Spectator," which appeared in the reign of Queen Anne, that up to that time daily service was still conducted in the London churches; and the office of the Communion or Mass was still frequently said. Under the Georges, the daily offices were omitted, and the Communions became scarcer and scarcer. Well might Wesley exclaim in one of his hymns, too Catholic for the self-named Wesleyans of to-day,

"Restore the Daily Sacrifice!"

Those were the Dark Ages, in which the appointed service of man to his Maker was thus curtailed.

There arose from all this corruption a swarm of sects, mostly identified in name with their founders, from the Brownists of Queen Elizabeth's reign to the Cumminsites of our own day;

"Legions of sects and insects come in throngs;
To name them all would tire a hundred tongues."

Those were the Dark Ages, that fostered the growth and encouraged the sub-divisions of schisms.

England is emerging from the Age of Darkness; the light blazes again from many of her altars, and adoration is made in the place where the sacred Feet have stood. But the Canadian Church is still in the midst of the Dark Ages, and her foes are they of her own household. A branch of the so-called Church Association (!) rears its mis-shapen front among us, heedless of the downfall of Puritanism at home; while the vast majority of our clergy are either miserably ignorant of the truth, or disgracefully timid in proclaiming it. Nevertheless, let us take heart by the decay of the Church Association in England, which is now decrepit and of divided council; and let us do all we can to prevent men who preach Calvinism and feed the Plymouth schism from staying the course of the Catholic Revival, and perpetuating among us the dull and cold traditions of the real Dark Ages.

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OTTAWA: A. S. WOODBURN, PRINTER, ELGIN STREET.

